

We all want our lives to be good. Celebrating the New Year is an opportunity for recalibration, *cheshbon nefesh*, and resolutions. It is the invitation to live better. I offer you this challenge: do these ten things and dare to enhance your life. Connect to your core, wake up with attitude, live with gratitude, transition with grace, take time off, be in sync with the earth, celebrate and count, bless, be a blessing, and fight for justice.

One: connect to your core. Take a moment to remember who you are each and every day. The first prayer we teach our children and the last prayer on our lips when we die is the *Shema*. In a world that has sidelined integrity, the simple daily practice of reciting the *Shema* orients us with our core beliefs. When we choose to open and close each day with core beliefs, we make a conscious choice to live that day with integrity. שמע ישראל יי אלהינו יי אחד; recite these words morning and night. Your days and lives will change.

Two: take a moment to wake up with attitude. Notice the blessings in your life. The practice of *birkot ha-shachar*, the morning blessings, is the discipline of setting gratitude as the foundational intention for the day. On any given day we each have a toad to swallow, a challenge to meet, a hardship to bear. But attitude shapes and molds our experiences. This year, choose to open each morning with the practice of discernment of the good, the blessings, even the miraculous in your life.

Three: live with gratitude. We all stop to eat several times a day. You are *how* you eat. We exist in a society that consumes voraciously, mindlessly, without a sense of the sacred. Jewish mindfulness requires that we bless before and after eating. It is a simple gesture that has the power to change our lives. Where did that food come from? Who participated in bringing it from the vine, the tree, or the earth to our tables? Pausing before we consume enables us to cultivate a connection to *El Chai*, the Ultimate Source. We must develop a value beyond mere consumption and survival. If we hope to live on this earth with grace, it is beyond time for us to weave gratitude into our daily routine of eating.

Four: transition with grace. Life is a litany of changes. We must strengthen our agility and ability to move from one day, stage, or challenge to the next. How do we transition in our work, in our marriages? Your Reform Rabbi recommends *mikveh*, the act of ritual immersion in *mayim chayim* (living water) to mark a new marriage, divorce, birth, death, or recovery. When we transition to a new job, retirement, coming-of-age, or menopause through ritual immersion, we are able to

experience that which we leave behind and those qualities with which we renew ourselves. Each year I lead women of our congregation through *mikveh* at a local swimming hole in preparation for the New Year. This year, when you are transitioning, bring meaning to life's passages with this *mitzvah*.

Five: take time off. Another year, 5779, has passed and I am moved by your sincere desire to take stock during the High Holidays. Where have we been? How are we doing? How can we better live to our fullest potential, our highest values? Nonetheless, meaningful *chesbon nefesh* cannot be accomplished through reflection on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* alone. We all need time for introspection and soul searching, but taking stock is an ongoing practice. This is the purpose of *Shabbat*. Our weekly Sabbath is the discipline we need to better our lives, to live in rhythm with ourselves, our values, and the people most important in our lives. Ahad Ha-am teaches, "More than the Jewish people keep *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* keeps the Jewish people." When we regularly keep the Sabbath, we are fundamentally changed. Mark the Sabbath, light *Shabbat* candles, and come to synagogue to sing, dance, study, pray, ruminate, connect. Make a Sabbath meal, observe *havdalah* in your home. Disconnect yourself from distractions for one day and you will be changed. Your lives will unfold in a richer, happier, and more meaningful way.

Six: be in sync with the earth. I know that you are serious about your Jewish identity. But if today is going to be meaningful you can't return to tomorrow unchanged. As Jews, we believe that to actualize our spirituality we must be connected to the earth and its inhabitants. Making *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* meaningful requires that we translate our prayers into deeds. This year I recommend that you take your commitments from the sanctuary and bring them into the *sukkah*. The *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *sukkah* connects us to the earth, her abundance and her fragility. Dwelling in the *sukkah*, a temporary structure, puts us face to face with the raw truth that the earth's resources are limited and must be protected. Dwelling in the *sukkah* connects us to our responsibility for the audacious hospitality modelled and taught by Abraham and Sarah. Abundance and joy require mindfulness and care; good stewardship of the earth and compassion for the other.

Seven: celebrate and count. We are committed to honest introspection as a catalyst for change. The fall holidays move us from soul searching to deed. The spring holidays move us from liberation to covenant. Each of you has a unique

tradition for your Passover *seder*, and the liberation celebrated on Passover is actualized through the renewal of covenant on *Shavuot*. The seven week period we count between Passover and Shavuot is called the *Omer*. Each day is marked by a *midah*, an opportunity for self examination of character which prepares us for revelation, the ability to live our lives more fully. This year, following the second day of Passover, I encourage you to join my course on counting the *Omer*. This act of spring reflection and self-exploration will change your life.

Eight: bless. We all want our lives to be good. Blessing is the act of acknowledging the God and the good that exists for us. It is not enough that the Sacred is. In the act of creation, the Source of life creates and then blesses. So too are we called upon to bring blessings to accompany our lives. It is traditional on Friday nights for parents to bless their children, for partners to bestow blessings on one another. Choose the *mitzvah* of blessing the people that are most important in your life each Shabbat. Blessings have the power to transform, to radically change our relationships.

Nine: be a blessing. When we have blessings, so too we are enjoined to be a blessing to others. Fullness of life is not a measure of that which we receive but rather that which we give. Judaism teaches that one tenth of that which we have must be designated for *tzedakah*. Today I invite you to observe the mitzvah of tithing; consider how we would be changed as a world, as a nation, and as a community if we tended to others with a tenth of the resources with which we care for ourselves.

Ten: fight for justice. We are only elevated when we elevate those around us. Love the Other as yourself. *V'ahvta l'reacha kamocho*. If we are going to begin to forge a just and equitable world, we need to protect for the other that which we want protected for ourselves. If I want clean drinking water and clean air, then I must fight that my neighbor has the same. If I want my children to feel safe, to have food in their bellies, and to have access to good education, then I must fight for my neighbor's children to have the same. If I want my family to live with dignity and have access to healthcare, then I must fight for a minimum wage in America to be a living wage and healthcare as a human right. If I hope to live in safety and security, then I must guarantee these same rights for the vulnerable in our midst.

Let this be the year in which we adopt these ten mitzvot. Maintain your sense of self, choose the framework with which you view the world, be thankful

for life's gifts, move through change with flexibility and open-mindedness, prioritize *Shabbat*, care for our earth with compassion and respect, mark our Jewish holidays with self-reflection, honor those around you, act with intention and generosity, and be an agent for justice in our world. *Ken y'hi ratzon.*